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Human Resources**

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**Redefining
Human Resources
at the
U.S. Environmental
Protection Agency**

2004

People Focused. Environmentally Driven.





**Office of
Human Resources**

People Focused. Environmentally Driven.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Message from the Director of OHR

Chapter 1: Redefining Human Resources

The Reorganization Structure	3
Communicating with our Customers	5

Chapter 2: Planning for Success

Advancing Human Capital Initiatives	9
Agency Restructuring	10
Buyouts and Early Outs	11
Expediting the Hiring Process	11
Performance Management System	12
President's Management Agenda Commitments	12
Workforce Planning	12

Chapter 3: Making Human Resources More Efficient

Competitive Sourcing Study	13
HR of the Future	13
Information Technology	14
E-government Initiatives	14
Enterprise Applications	14
PeoplePlus	15

Chapter 4: Partnering for Success

Human Capital Innovation Fund Program	17
Human Resource Assessments	19
Human Resources in the Programs	19
Labor and Employee Relations	20
Working with our Program Management Officials	21

Chapter 5: Attracting Talent

Active Outreach	23
EPA Intern Program	23
Special Emphasis Recruitment Initiatives	25
African American Diversity Strategy and Initiatives	25
American Indians and Alaska Native Initiatives	25
Asian American and Pacific Islander Initiatives	26
National Hispanic Outreach	27
Senior Environmental Employment Program	28
Summer Student Employment Program	29
Talent Branding	30

Chapter 6: Hiring Talent

EZHire	33
Orientation Program	34
Human Resource Consulting Services	34
Processing Transactions	35

Chapter 7: Nuturing Talent

Benefits Program	37
Retirement Counseling Center	37
Leave Bank	38
New Hire Survey	39
Project Announcement Visibility Effort (PAVE)	39
Senior Executive Programs	39
SES Candidate Development Program	39
Placing SES Program Graduates	41
Enhancing SES Communications	41
Pay for Performance	41
Workforce Development	42

Chapter 8: People Focused. Environmentally Driven.

Refining our Future	45
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MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR OF OHR



Rafael DeLeon
Director
Office of Human Resources (OHR)
Office of Administration and Resources Management (OARM)
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

Nothing stays the same, nor should it. As we learn more about the world around us, we use that information to make advances that improve our lives. But advances big or small start one step at a time. It's like the first time a baby decides to walk all by herself. Everyone holds their breath and waits. Will the child master a step or two? Or will she stumble and fall? There will be many tries before she is fully confident in her abilities. And yet, inevitably, her hard work pays off.

This year, the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) human resources organization took many steps - big steps towards doing things differently in order to better serve our customers and the environment.

In April 2004, we launched our newly reorganized Office of Human Resources (OHR). With a Deputy Director to lead our National Human Capital Strategy and a Deputy Director for Customer Service, OHR is now well positioned to lead the EPA's efforts to recruit, develop, and strategically plan for the most talented workforce possible to protect public health and the environment.

We have made great progress this past year in leading EPA's efforts to achieve the President's Management Agenda for the Strategic Management of Human Capital. The initiatives discussed in this report will help to demonstrate how we are developing our workforce to ensure that the Agency has the right people with the right skills, in the right place, at the right time.

We also focused on a very important aspect of Human Resources: our partnerships. We worked diligently this past year with our program and regional offices to design and implement improvements to our customer service policies and practices.

These improvements will help make our services more timely and accurate, and ensure that our human resource professionals are accessible and attentive to the needs of EPA's managers and employees.

We also made advances in E-government initiatives. This year we brought Web-based training opportunities to EPA's employees, and found new and improved ways to integrate data and automate the processing of forms. Working in partnership with the Office of the Chief Financial Officer and the Office of Environmental Information, we went live with PeoplePlus, an integrated human resources, payroll, time and labor system. It was a major undertaking that will position us to move forward with the implementation of several other electronic applications.

We took other steps as well: steps to attract highly qualified, diverse talent into EPA's workforce through a number of special emphasis recruitment initiatives; steps to create a talent brand and expand our EPA Intern and Summer Student Employment Programs so that EPA employment opportunities would appeal to a wide variety of individuals; and steps to nurture the talent already working at EPA through workforce development, Senior Executive Programs, and an extensive benefits program.

And the most important step we have taken is our commitment. The employees of OHR have committed to remain *people focused and environmentally driven*. This means we will continue to work one-on-one with our customers to serve their needs while we scan the horizon to identify trends which will impact human resources. Each step in the process will bring us closer to our goal: *becoming the premier Human Resources Office in the Federal Government*.

Rafael DeLeon
Director
Office of Human Resources (OHR)
Office of Administration and Resources Management (OARM)
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)



CHAPTER 1 - REDEFINING HUMAN RESOURCES

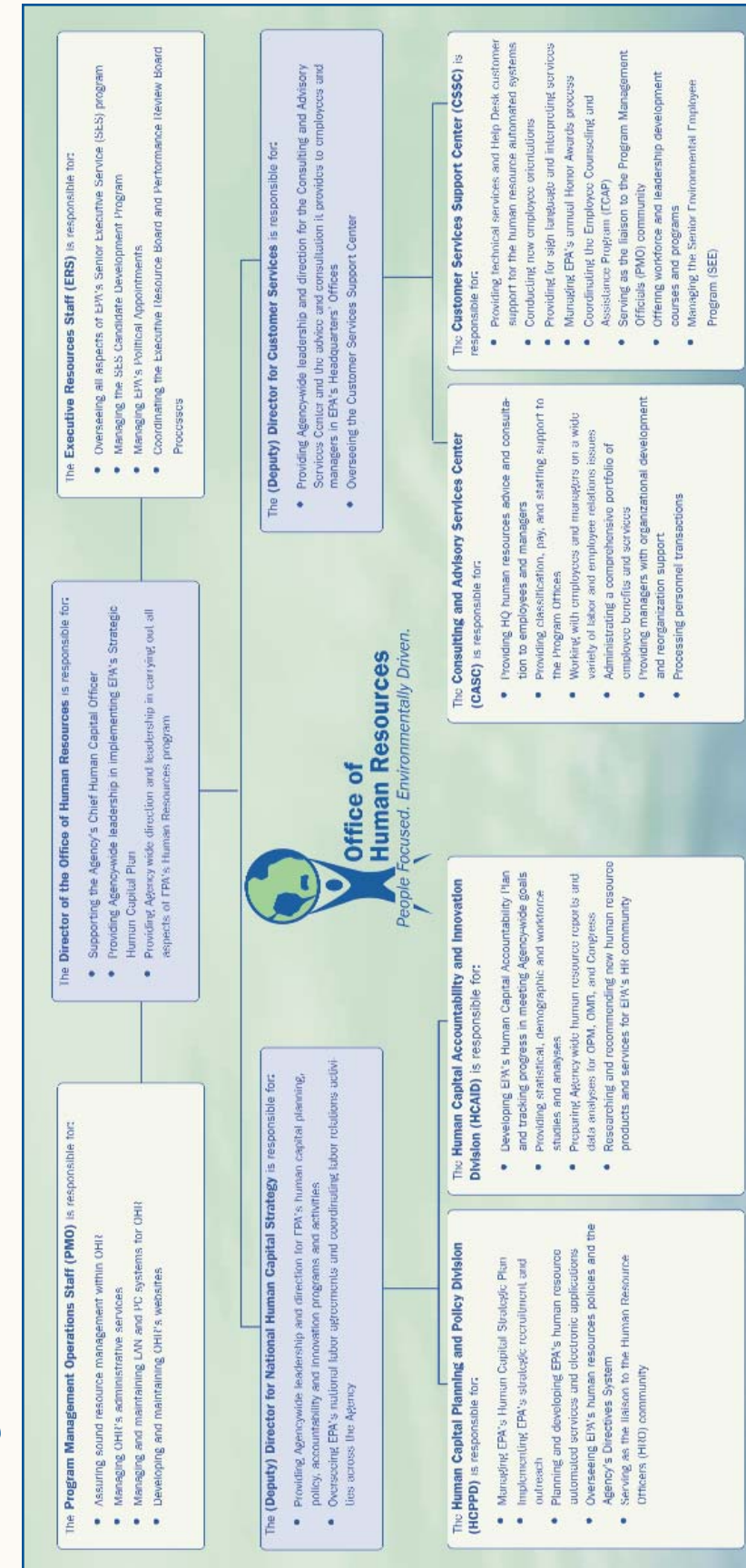
THIS YEAR, EPA OFFICIALLY LAUNCHED A NEW HUMAN RESOURCES ORGANIZATION, THE OFFICE OF HUMAN RESOURCES (OHR). OVER TWO YEARS IN THE PLANNING, THE GOAL OF THE OHR REORGANIZATION WAS TO CREATE A STRUCTURE THAT WOULD HELP EPA'S HUMAN RESOURCE PROFESSIONALS TO WORK MORE EFFICIENTLY, RESPOND FASTER AND SERVE CUSTOMERS BETTER.

After rigorously examining the best practices of private industry and the Federal Government, and getting valuable input from EPA employees, a design was selected that aligned human resource functions with the needs and mission of the Agency and addressed changes happening in the field of human resources.

The Reorganization Structure

OHR is different from its predecessor organization in several key ways. Management positions were reduced and executive resources and political appointment functions were moved to a newly formed Executive Resources Staff. Other organizational functions were split between two Deputy Directors, one for managing the National Human Capital Strategy, and one for Customer Services. This structure enables OHR to provide program managers and other EPA employees with one-stop human resources services. It also enables OHR to focus EPA's financial and personnel resources to help optimize technology, advance E-government, and implement the President's Management Agenda and Strategic Human Capital Plan initiatives.

OHR Reorganization Chart



CHAPTER 1 - REDEFINING HUMAN RESOURCES

Communicating with our Customers

Creating a new human resources organization was step one. Explaining how the new organization will operate for both OHR's staff and employees across the Agency required a comprehensive communication campaign. It began with the creation of a new office logo and name, and continued with the development of a variety of products and outreach events that will be implemented throughout 2005.

To prepare OHR's employees for the change, numerous meetings were held with organizational units both prior to, and following, the reorganization. All-hands briefings and brochures were created to explain where new functions would be located. EPA's employees were also kept informed through mailings and posters located throughout the Agency complex.

On April 4, 2004, OHR hosted an official launch event for OHR's employees, EPA's senior leadership team and human resource professionals from the program and regional offices. A highlight of the event was the viewing of an eight minute video entitled, *'Renewed Commitment—EPA's New Office of Human Resources.'* The video provided an overview of the many services offered through OHR and featured EPA employees who provided testimonials as to how these services had impacted their life. The video was also distributed to program and regional human resource offices and continues to be a regular feature of the Headquarter's new employee orientation program. The video also helped to reaffirm for OHR employees that the work that they do is both important in peoples' lives and contributes to the accomplishment of EPA's environmental mission.

In addition, a series of four displays were created to further inform employees about the services offered by OHR. Designed to be posted throughout 2005 in EPA's cafeteria and main Headquarters office building, the displays cover the topics of employee benefits, management services, workforce development, and Headquarters' services and feature testimonials from employees. A smaller version of the series was also created and displayed on tables throughout EPA's cafeteria.

OHR Reorganization Communication Materials

New Name, Logo and Tagline



Informational Brochures



CHAPTER 1 - REDEFINING HUMAN RESOURCES

Reorganization Launch Event Video



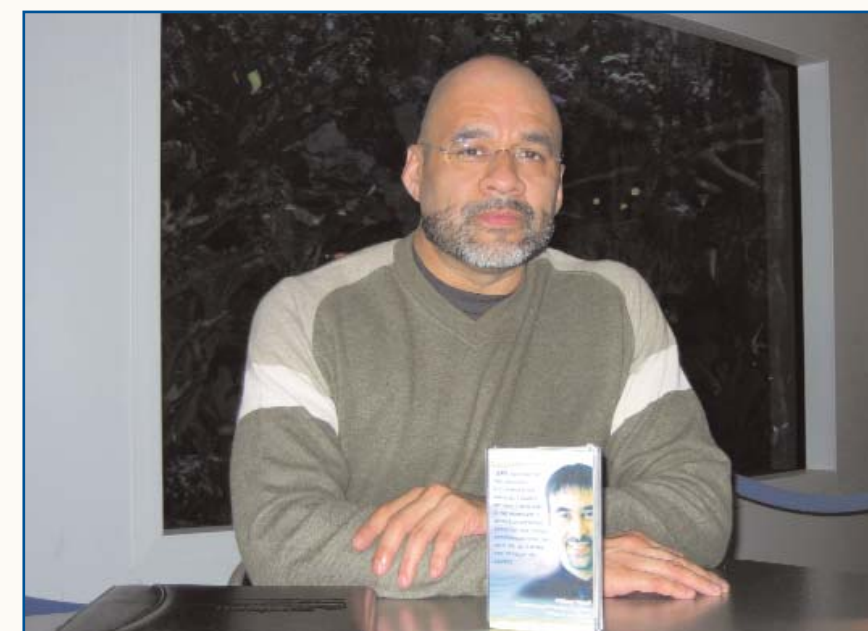
Poster Displays



Intranet Video Clips



Table Displays



CHAPTER 2 - PLANNING FOR SUCCESS

OHR IS ALWAYS LOOKING FOR NEW WAYS TO HELP THE AGENCY ACHIEVE GREATER ORGANIZATIONAL FLEXIBILITY. ONE OF THE WAYS WE DO THIS IS BY EXPEDITING AND SIMPLIFYING THE RESTRUCTURING PROCESS. OUR GOAL IS TO CREATE AND SUSTAIN AN AGENCY WHICH IS NOT ONLY RESULTS-DRIVEN, BUT RESPONSIVE TO EMERGING CHALLENGES. TO ACHIEVE THESE GOALS, IT IS IMPORTANT TO BE ABLE TO QUICKLY REDEPLOY EMPLOYEES TO MEET NEW AND CHANGING WORK DEMANDS.

Advancing Human Capital Initiatives

"Prior to the reorganization, most of our short-term and long-term human capital initiatives were scattered throughout the organization," said Rich Bashar, OHR's Deputy Director for National Human Capital Strategy. "By putting them together, we have been able to give the efforts more visibility, clarify where to go for information on a particular issue, and elevate the importance of this work," Rich added.

The OHR reorganization has enabled Rich to use matrix management more often in addressing the wide variety of complex and intertwined issues that impact the entire organization. "We are doing a much better job now of bringing together people from across OHR and the Agency to lend their collective expertise to an issue. In addition, we revised our Workforce Plan from a bottom-up to a top-down approach. This helped us to achieve a yellow status score in meeting EPA's Presidential Management Agenda goals," said Rich.

The approach also earned EPA a 2004 Leading Edge Award from the International Public Management Association for Human Resources (IPMA.) "I am very pleased that IPMA recognized OHR's success in aligning our human capital strategies with the mission and goals of the Agency," said Rich. "We showed real progress on our executive branch management scorecard and utilization of OPM's human capital dimensions," Rich added.

"I am also very proud of our work on PeoplePlus," Rich added. In 2004, OHR integrated the Agency's human resource data with the Agency's payroll data. This was no small feat. "We had to upgrade our human resource data to a Web-based system," said Rich. "At the same time, we had to migrate EPA's payroll data to the Defense Finance Accounting System and create a new IT investment plan. Our hard work paid off and the new OHR IT investment plan was recognized as one of the best IT plans in the Agency," said Rich.

In 2005, the National Human Capital Strategy staff will be spending a lot of time working on a new multi-tiered Performance Management System. But whether EPA uses a pass-fail or multi-tiered system, or moves to a 'Pay for Performance' system, Rich believes feedback is the key. "Both supervisors and employees need to be schooled in how to give and receive feedback, so my office developed an online tutorial to help in this area," Rich said.

"OHR is preparing for the future, including advancements in the field of knowledge management," said Rich. "We're working towards the day when employees can have their human resource questions answered over the Internet using a system similar to 'Ask Jeeves.com.' I am also encouraged that we are looking at measurement differently."

"We are not just looking at output measures, but at accountability issues as well, to determine whether something is really making a difference and what that difference is. There is a lot to look forward to," Rich added.

Rich is particularly excited about the new Level of Business (LOB) concept that will enable agencies to focus more on human resources planning and policy tasks needed to accomplish the Agency's mission, rather than processing paper forms. "Since 1996, I have been trying to find technological solutions to reduce the burden of processing human resource transactions," said Rich. "It has been an uphill effort, but I am hopeful that LOB service centers will help us to achieve this," Rich added.

Agency Restructuring

This year, we streamlined EPA's reorganization process by revising a Delegation (1-44) to allow Assistant Administrators and Regional Administrators to approve their own reorganizations.

OHR and its parent organization, the Office of Administration and Resources Management (OARM), will still be responsible for reviewing reorganization proposals. However, final responsibility and authority for deciding to reorganize will now rest with the organization requesting it.



"OHR is preparing for the future, including advancements in the field of knowledge management.

We are not just looking at output measures, but at accountability issues as well, to determine whether something is really making a difference and what that difference is. There is a lot to look forward to."



CHAPTER 2 - PLANNING FOR SUCCESS

One of the ways that OHR assists organizations interested in restructuring is through the information and guidance that we have placed on the reorganization Web site, located at: <http://intranet.epa.gov/ohr/programs/reorganizations/index.htm>. This year, we improved the Web site to make it more user-friendly. We updated and expanded the 'Reorganization Tool Kit' to add templates, as well as easy-to-use forms, current organizational charts and functional statements. We also added a decision-making tool to help managers determine if a reorganization is necessary, or if there are other significant management changes that should be considered first, such as training, workflow changes, or technology improvements.

Our work in simplifying the reorganization process helps assure that EPA is structured in the best, most efficient way to provide service and be accessible to the public. According to our customers, it also helps them save time and resources by shortening their reorganization process by several weeks.

Buyouts and Early Outs

The Office of Human Resources managed the Agency's plan to renew EPA's 2003 buyout/early out authority under the Homeland Security Act. The Agency's plan, approved by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and Office of Management and Budget (OMB) in October, outlined the workforce succession planning efforts to restructure mission-related positions in accordance with EPA's Strategy for Human Capital.

The 2004 buyout/early out plan, like the 2003 plan, focused on providing buyout/early out opportunities to 3,359 employees in the SES, GS14s, GS15s, and clerical and administrative support personnel.

To support the buyout and early out program, OHR prepared option papers on back-filling vacancies and deferral requests, statistically tracked buyout/early out activity, and worked with the Office of the Chief Financial Officer to ensure budget neutrality of the program.

Expediting the Hiring Process

EPA has adopted the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) 45-day hiring model to be used to develop a process for tracking the steps and time it takes to hire someone into the Agency, and to address significant deviations from meeting the 45-day goal. EPA agrees with OPM that one of the ways agencies can better compete for talented workers is to find ways to improve efficiencies in the federal hiring process. Placing a limit of 45 days from the date the vacancy closes to the day an offer of employment is extended to an applicant is one way to do this. Using data from EZHire, OHR developed a standard hiring process and a reporting system to monitor and help improve compliance with this goal.

Performance Management System

To further support the President's Management Agenda, OHR has been leading EPA's effort to establish an effective performance management culture that fosters feedback and recognizes the good work of employees. This year, the performance management system guidance and training modules were updated to link performance standards to EPA's Strategic Plan goals for all employees and managers. An online tutorial was developed for managers and supervisors to assist them in learning effective feedback techniques, including recognition of outstanding performance and procedures for improving poor performance. Work is also underway to help the Agency change from a two-level to a multi-level performance system in 2005 to ensure employee's outstanding contributions are recognized and appreciated.

President's Management Agenda Commitments

In 2004, OHR undertook several initiatives to support EPA's Strategy for Human Capital and the President's Management Agenda. Most significantly, we reorganized human resources activities under the Office of Human Resources. This will strengthen our ability to implement and accomplish the Agency's Strategy for Human Capital.

OHR also brought EPA's entire human capital strategy community together for a Strategic HR Partners Forum to focus on the new and emerging role of human resources in supporting the Agency's human capital strategies. In addition to this successful meeting, EPA was able to achieve a "yellow" status on our Human Capital scorecard, one quarter ahead of schedule.

Workforce Planning

In 2004, OHR completed work on refining EPA's workforce planning strategy and implementation plan to ensure that it supported the Agency's strategic planning efforts and would be useful in identifying current and future human capital needs.

During the year, approximately 1,200 employees from nine offices and regions participated in a pilot to test our proposed workforce planning methodology and online competency inventory. Based on lessons learned from this pilot, a strategy was developed to assess workforce requirements for the Agency as a whole.

Once this assessment has been implemented, employees will have a better understanding of what is expected of them, how their work relates to the Agency's mission and goals, and the opportunities available to them across the Agency. With this knowledge, employees will be more satisfied and successful. Managers will be able to use this data to forecast workforce needs and skill gaps due to retirement, as well as identify and combat significant human resource issues before they manifest themselves or escalate.



CHAPTER 3 - MAKING HUMAN RESOURCES MORE EFFICIENT

ONE OF EPA'S PRIMARY HUMAN CAPITAL GOALS IS TO PERFORM HUMAN RESOURCE SERVICES IN WAYS THAT ARE COST-EFFECTIVE, RESULTS-DRIVEN, AND RESPONSIVE TO EMERGING CHALLENGES. THIS YEAR, OHR LED MANY OF EPA'S ACTIVITIES IN THIS AREA, HELPING THE AGENCY TO MOVE CLOSER TO RECEIVING A "GREEN" RATING ON THE PRESIDENT'S MANAGEMENT AGENDA HUMAN CAPITAL SCORECARD.

Competitive Sourcing Study

The Office of Human Resources, utilizing OMB Circular A-76 guidelines, completed an extensive study in preparation for competing out the delivery of employee benefit services for EPA's employees. As part of the study, OHR examined workload data, interviewed employees performing the affected work, provided workload projections, developed performance standards and benchmarked other federal agencies. A Request for Proposals (RFP) was posted in FEDBIZOPPS in Mid-September.

The competitive procurement included the following benefit services: Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB); Federal Employees Group Life Insurance (FEGLI); The Thrift Savings Plan (TSP); Retirement Benefits and Counseling; Unemployment Compensation; Workers' Compensation; Leave Bank and Leave Transfer; Employee Counseling and Assistance Program (ECAP); Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA); Decedent Affair (death); Flexible Spending Accounts (FSA); Long Term Care (LTC); and Childcare Tuition Assistance.

HR of the Future

In 2003, the Office of Management and Budget directed federal agencies to find ways to provide services using five specific E-government Lines of Business (LOB). One of these E-government initiatives deals with human resources. Throughout 2004, OHR worked with the Office of Personnel Management on the Human Resources Line of Business (HR LOB) Task Force.

Work on the Task Force has entailed responding to an Enterprise Architecture survey, taking an inventory of EPA's HR systems, participating in workshops to validate HR sub-functions and business processes, and commenting on a number of HR LOB Task Force documents.

On behalf of EPA, OHR recently signed the HR LOB Charter and Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to support the development and implementation of a modern, government-wide, cost-effective and interoperable human resources system which will rely on the creation of independent service centers.

Information Technology

An important goal for OHR's information technology professionals is to develop and roll-out resources that give managers, program management officers, human resource practitioners and employees the tools they need to create, access, and maintain critical human resource data and information.

E-government Initiatives

In 2004, a government-wide effort was launched to consolidate all federal agencies into two payroll providers. As a result, OHR is analyzing the requirements necessary to help EPA's payroll system migrate to a system managed by the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS). Expected in 2006, EPA's payroll will be processed by DFAS, with EPA continuing to have responsibility for our own human resource, time and labor systems. OHR is also working with the Office of Personnel Management to review human resource data elements that will need to be integrated government-wide for various workforce analytical tools, electronic forms, and an electronic Official Personnel Folder (OPF).

Enterprise Applications

Using the human resources data that is stored in PeoplePlus, OHR has been working to create a number of systems to automate business processes that are currently time and labor intensive.



"The Enterprise Applications Project (E-apps) will enable EPA's managers and employees to partner with OHR to make all of our jobs easier."



CHAPTER 3 - MAKING HUMAN RESOURCES MORE EFFICIENT

“It is very exciting to work on a project that helps to open up the mystery of human resources to everyone in EPA,” states Joanne Alfano, Manager of the Enterprise Applications Project (E-apps). E-apps will enable EPA’s managers and employees to partner with OHR to make all of our jobs easier,” Joanne added.

The first E-apps systems will deal with training administration and E-development. An employee who requests a training course currently fills out a form which is signed by their manager, financed by their funds certifying officer and processed by a Regional or Program training officer. These forms are routed from office to office, by hand or inter-office mail. E-apps will allow all of these individuals to create, review and approve a training request electronically. Employees will receive automatic e-mail messages each time their request has completed another step in the approval process, and have the ability to track the status of their request at all times.

Employees and managers will be able to have access to a complete record of the employee’s training, which will be updated and maintained automatically. Training offered through OPM’s Go Learn program or the National Environmental Training Institute (NETI) will eventually be automatically fed into an employee’s training record. Employees will also have the ability to record other training that they have taken on their own.

According to Joanne, “This system will also assist individuals throughout the Agency who have a responsibility for serving as the registrar for various Agency training activities. Employees will be able to register for courses electronically, be placed on waiting lists, and notified of their registration status quickly and with much less effort on the part of the registrar.”

In 2004, Training Officers and funding officers throughout the Agency participated in design sessions to define requirements and streamline processes. A pilot project was pre-launched with a test in Region 9. Additional pilots are in the works and a full launch is expected for spring 2005.

“This is just the beginning,” adds Joanne. “Next in line for production is electronic routing of personnel action requests, commonly referred to as an ‘SF 52.’ This will really help to expedite and transform the way the Agency provides human resources services. Employees will be able to initiate many simple changes such as name changes, and managers will be able to easily track the status of all actions. It will help everyone to work more efficiently,” Joanne added.

PeoplePlus

Delivering an integrated human resource, payroll, time and labor system in a Web-based environment seemed a daunting and somewhat impossible task two years ago.



Every employee now enters their time into the PeoplePlus system.

While the effort has been immense, the cooperative efforts of OHR, the Office of the Chief Financial Officer and the Office of Environmental Information came to fruition this year as PeoplePlus went live. OHR was involved in every step of the process through its development, implementation, and production. OHR’s information technology specialists worked with employees from every region, lab and headquarters office to test, train, identify and resolve business process issues.

The benefits and opportunities achieved through PeoplePlus are numerous. PeoplePlus provides the opportunity for EPA to automate many current paper processes by allowing managers to view, route and reassign actions from their desktop. Of course, there were challenges too. In implementing PeoplePlus, EPA needed to have a better way to handle ‘Identity Access Management (IAM).’ Initial improvements were made by creating a way to use a single point of authentication. As a result of these improvements, the system’s security is more reliable, individuals only have to use and remember a single password for both LAN and PeoplePlus access, and Network Ids have been standardized.

To prepare for going live with PeoplePlus, OHR held numerous Fit/Gap sessions to determine how to improve methods for reporting productivity for our regional and program partners. Several new and improved reports were created and are being electronically transmitted bi-weekly to customers. Ad-hoc reporting tools are also being developed to provide users with the ability to see, print, and extract the precise data that they want.

CHAPTER 4 - PARTNERING FOR SUCCESS

THE OFFICE OF HUMAN RESOURCES WOULD NOT SUCCEED IN ITS MISSION WITHOUT THE COLLABORATION OF ITS PARTNERS. EVERYDAY, OHR WORKS WITH EPA'S UNIONS, PROGRAM MANAGEMENT OFFICERS, AND HUMAN RESOURCE OFFICES IN THE REGIONS. TOGETHER, WE PROVIDE HUMAN RESOURCE SERVICES TO THE AGENCY'S 18,000 EMPLOYEES.

Human Capital Innovation Fund Program

Creating organizational systems that foster and fully utilize employee creativity and innovation is one of EPA's human capital goals. To support this effort, OHR awards small "grants" to regional, field and program offices to fund initiatives that integrate human capital efforts with the Agency's environmental mission.

This year, the following projects received support from OHR:

- An Office of Water (OW) Training Evaluation Scorecard to calculate the return on investment of training programs in relationship to progress made in meeting EPA/OW strategic goals.
- A Diversity Marketing Plan created by the Office of Research and Development (ORD) to promote jobs and other scientific opportunities to external customers, and an ORD-specific Orientation Program.
- An Assistive Technology Center in Region 9 for employees and members of the public who have disabilities.
- A skills and competencies assessment of all agency HR professionals, conducted by Region 2.

The grant to Region 2 is for conducting work on behalf of EPA's human resource community in all ten regions and three laboratories. The result of this work is expected to make a real difference for human resource professionals Agency-wide.


According to Carmen Negron, Assistant Branch Chief for Human Resources in Region 2, and the coordinator for the Region 2 grant, "The purpose of this grant is to conduct an assessment process that will identify the current proficiency levels of core and technical competencies of EPA's human resource professionals and to identify employees' aptitudes and motivation for learning."

"With the information obtained through the assessment, the Human Resource Officers (HROs) will be able to make decisions about training and development, identify the skill gaps that affect employee performance, and provide employees with a framework for personal career planning," states Carmen.

"HR staff will also learn and understand their current proficiency levels as they relate to the future role and responsibilities of a human resources professional. EPA's Human Resource Officers have identified the competencies and the proficiency levels that we believe human resource professionals need, and our human resource employees should have, in order to succeed both today and in the future," added Carmen.

The Human Capital Innovation Fund grant money will be used to obtain the services of a consultant in order to access current employee skill levels (basic, intermediate or advanced) and include a description of the proficiency level. With the proper identification of skill gaps, a corresponding developmental program may be recommended such as more classroom training, Web site courses, or an actual HR Certification program.

"We expect to begin the assessments in early 2005," said Carmen.



"The purpose of this grant is to conduct an assessment that will identify the current proficiency levels of core and technical competencies of EPA's human resource professionals and to identify employees' aptitudes and motivation for learning."



CHAPTER 4 - PARTNERING FOR SUCCESS

Human Resource Assessments

To ensure that human resources merit system principles are maintained, OHR oversees a self-assessment program for all Human Resource Offices and conducts several on-site reviews each year. This year, using newly developed Agency assessment guidance, OHR reviewed how personnel transactions were processed in Region 2 - New York, Region 10 - Seattle, and the Cincinnati Field Office (which includes OARM, OCFO, OW and the ORD organizations).

Human Resources in the Programs

"In the Office of Water (OW), we are striving to manage our human resources in ways that actively help us achieve our mission," said Susan Gilbertson, the Program Management Officer (PMO) for OW. Susan knows what she is talking about because she has spent 15 years working in EPA's water programs both in Region 5 and Headquarters. "We have strategic goals and objectives at the Agency level, the OW level and the program level. Cultivating a diverse, creative and flexible workforce is essential to us in terms of accomplishing those goals and objectives. The questions we ask are not just about why someone wants to work at EPA, but why they are motivated by Public Service," Susan added.

According to Susan, the human resource challenges for OHR and OW are large. "EPA is no longer a young agency with major new statutory requirements accompanied by big budgets," she said. "Now we must work with lower funding levels to achieve even greater economic and environmental benefits as outlined in our strategic plan. In addition, implementing the President's Management Agenda will require many changes in our business practices and tools over the next few years. This can be daunting, but it also provides great opportunities," Susan added.

To respond to the coming changes, Susan believes that employees will need different skill sets than in the past. States Susan, "Gone are the days when someone was hired as a scientist and only had to focus on the "science" of their area of expertise. Now, employees need to utilize good writing and public speaking skills, excellent analytical skills and use of collaborative problem solving and consensus building abilities to accomplish their projects. OW needs financial analysts, marketing experts and security specialists as well as engineers, economists, and toxicologists." Susan pointed out that, "As we add water security to our portfolio of program responsibilities, we are going to be adding new and different career paths for staff."

OW is working to identify and fill the gaps in training needed by the existing workforce, and to supplement those skills with additional training and recruits. Adds Susan, "OW is working with supervisors to recognize and articulate the new skill sets needed in the workforce. We are also working with OHR so we can more effectively advertise and recruit for a diverse and qualified pool of applicants."


Labor and Employee Relations

Partnering with EPA's unions is a priority for the Office of Human Resources. By working together, EPA has been able to reduce grievance activity and provide for better communication between the Agency and its unions. Partnering has also helped OHR to use resources more wisely and negotiate more efficiently.

This year, the Office of Human Resources National Labor Relations Team organized a number of National Partnership Council (NPC) and Headquarters Partnership Council (HPC) executive board and annual meetings. These meetings provided an opportunity for management officials and union representatives to explore issues, review materials, and discuss ways to cooperate and collaborate to the mutual benefit of both parties.

In the spirit of partnership, much work has occurred this past year in implementing EPA's Labor-Management Partnership Strategic Plan and Operational Guidance. The plan, which was put into effect in April 2003, called for increased use of Pre-Decisional Involvement (PDI). PDI enables employees, through their elected union representatives, to have an opportunity to shape decisions which impact employees' work before final management action is taken.

To ensure that all parties fully understood the PDI process, OHR published an EPA Pre-Decisional Involvement (PDI) Handbook. The PDI Handbook, approved by the NPC in June 2004, provides guidance and exercises to help managers and employees use a collaborative and voluntary approach towards changing working conditions for bargaining unit employees.



"The questions we ask are not just about why someone wants to work at EPA, but why they are motivated by Public Service."



CHAPTER 4 - PARTNERING FOR SUCCESS

In addition to completing the PDI Handbook, an Agency-wide PDI Training Plan was completed and launched. The plan calls for providing PDI training to one management representative and one union official for each of EPA's different geographic locations. The first training session was held in San Francisco, California in November 2004, with others to follow. After completion of the training course, the management representative and union official in each location will become the joint PDI trainers for their employees. This will facilitate implementation of PDI Agency-wide.

A significant achievement this past year has been our successful negotiations with EPA unions on the implementation of PeoplePlus, an electronic time, labor, and attendance system.


Working with our Program Management Officials

"One of the outcomes of the OHR reorganization was the creation of two Deputies, each with responsibility for an important human resources function. By placing equal importance on both strategic planning and customer service, OHR is much better poised to address the evolving human resource needs of EPA and the Federal Government," states Bob Thorlakson, Deputy Director for Customer Service.

According to Bob, "Organizing the human resource staffs to be multifaceted has enabled them to provide one-stop-shopping and function more like the Regional Human Resource Officers. Even though our structure has changed, the work is still very paper-intensive. While the piles of paper never seem to end, we have begun to streamline our business processes and find ways to improve the timeliness of our service to our program managers."

"While we are still working towards greater Agency adoption of new HR technologies, there are exciting changes happening in the Federal Government as a result of the Office of Management and Budget's 'HR Line-of-Business.' There will be more self-service made possible through expanded use of technology. Transactions will be processed at a centralized Federal location, and EPA's human resource professionals will be spending more of their time providing strategic consultative services. It is just a matter of time," said Bob.

Bob Thorlakson has worked in EPA's human resource organization for the past 14 years. "Over time" he said, "I have come to realize that the Agency can't accomplish its mission without the right people. OHR's job is to assist managers in the daily challenge of running their organization by helping them to hire the right people in the right place at the right time. It is also our responsibility to help ensure that the Office of Human Resources supports EPA's employees throughout their career. These are important functions that contribute to the accomplishment of the Agency's mission. Customer service work is not easy and requires a lot of dedication. I am fortunate to work with a staff that is very dedicated and hard working, and we all look forward to finding new and better ways to serve our customers," said Bob.



"One of the outcomes of the OHR reorganization was the creation of two Deputies, each with responsibility for an important human resources function. By placing equal importance on both strategic planning and customer service, OHR is much better poised to address the evolving human resource needs of EPA and the federal government."



CHAPTER 5 - ATTRACTING TALENT

OHR's RECRUITMENT AND OUTREACH PROGRAM HELPS THE AGENCY FIND A DIVERSE POOL OF CANDIDATES THAT IS THE BEST AND BRIGHTEST TO APPLY FOR POSITIONS AT EPA.

Active Outreach

While hiring decisions rest entirely with the program managers and supervisors, OHR works with these managers to help ensure that the pool of potential employees is highly qualified, would help us to achieve/maintain diversity, and would enhance the retention of employees who are ultimately hired. OHR also works to support recruiters across the Agency by organizing a Recruiting Coordinators Conference, preparing a comprehensive calendar of recruiting events, and developing a wide variety of tools and materials for their use. Each year, OHR actively organizes, attends and helps to sponsor and coordinate a number of local and national job fairs. This year OHR recruiting and outreach staff, along with EPA employees from program and regional offices, participated in 26 job fairs.

EPA Intern Program

Over the past six years, OHR has facilitated the hiring of 191 highly qualified and diverse interns. This year, OHR once again completed the advertisement and screening for EPA's seventh Intern Program class. The 38 interns were selected out of a group of 1,267 applicants. The two-year program includes work rotations, developmental assignments, classroom instruction and field work.

As a 2004 graduate of the EPA Intern Program's fifth intern class, Bruce Franklin has experienced a lot since he graduated from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University just two years ago. He spent much of that time in Washington, DC and New York City, and has decided that EPA is a good place to call home.

"I never really thought about coming to work at EPA," said Bruce. "I had always planned on going to work in private industry as a safety inspector where I could make more money. But one of OHR's recruiters came to visit my university and really sold me on the benefits of the EPA Intern Program, and I was hooked," Bruce said.

While interning at EPA, Bruce has found many ways to apply his degree in Occupational Safety and Health. In fact, he found ways that he never expected. "I worked on emergency response issues with the Mayor of Washington, DC; I worked for the Office of Research and Development in their Research Triangle Park laboratory (which was a great opportunity to really see a laboratory environment up close); I spent a few months in our New York Regional Office (Region 2) working on Environmental Justice issues; and I spent some time in the Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance helping with their federal facilities work," Bruce said.

"There is no doubt in my mind that EPA's Intern Program is one of the best programs in the Agency," added Bruce. "It has been a great ride, and I have learned a whole new

range of skill sets. I am definitely going to make EPA my home and hope one day to be an SES in a program office. At EPA, I know I can make it happen," Bruce said.

Erika Wilson came to EPA after budget cuts eliminated her county conservation corp reforestation job. "I decided to explore a clearinghouse which advertised environmental employment," said Erika, a member of the 2003 EPA Intern Class. "A notice there directed me to the EZHire site and a listing for internship opportunities," she added.

"I have really enjoyed my intern experience," Erika added. "My intern class is a very close group. We get together for lunch and outside of work. We are so diverse in every way and I have really enjoyed learning from people who are so very different from my background," said Erika.

Erika has completed a detail dealing with environmental justice issues and is currently learning about EPA grants. Before she completes the program, she will spend some time learning about environmental issues that impact Native Americans, and hopefully spend some time in a program office working on regulatory and policy issues. According to Erika, "It has been a great experience to learn about so many different things, even things out of my comfort range of knowledge. I have gained a great deal of experience and I look forward to focusing on one environmental issue more aggressively," said Erika.



"There is no doubt in my mind that EPA's Intern Program is one of the best programs in the Agency."



CHAPTER 5 - ATTRACTING TALENT

“One of the exciting experiences that really struck me was attending a National Environmental Justice Advisory Council (NEJAC) meeting. It was fascinating to be around EPA, industry, university, and community group experts as they all discussed ways to make the environment better for all groups. My education taught me that it really is a global world where we need to be sensitive to each other’s differences. Attending the NEJAC meeting helped me to see how coming to EPA will allow me to use the lessons of my formal training while working for issues that I love,” said Erika.

Special Emphasis Recruitment Initiatives

African American Diversity Strategy and Initiatives

This year, OHR supported the African American Male Forum (AAMF) in their development of a strategy that builds upon the Agency’s efforts to create a culture in EPA that allows all employees to succeed on their own skill, abilities and performance. Key components of the strategy address the goals of increasing representation of African Americans in the Agency, advancing current diversity programs and initiatives, and clarifying management’s responsibility for diversity results.

American Indian and Alaska Native Initiatives

Also this year, EPA created a position within OHR to work on American Indian and Alaska Native outreach, recruitment and retention issues. A plan for EPA is in the final stages which will address a broad array of issues including: environmental training and technical assistance, scholarships, internships, recruitment and retention, and training employees to work effectively with Tribes.

Special projects are planned to enable members of the Senior Executive Service to have a detail assignment with an American Indian Tribe, to arrange for Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA) mobility assignments with tribal colleges, and to develop partnerships with these colleagues to recruit more American Indians into the environmental fields.

Asian American and Pacific Islander Initiatives

The White House launched its Asian American and Pacific Islander Initiative to increase employment opportunities while also improving public health and addressing the environmental needs of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs). The initiative is managed by OHR, but responsibility for outreach to this community is spread throughout all the program offices and regions.

One of the major projects for the AAPI community this past year has been the implementation of the EPA Nail Care Project. The goal of this project was to provide information on the health and environmental effects of working in the nail care industry, and to provide technical training to nail care salon owners and workers. With support from all of the regions and leadership from Region 6 and OPPTS, seven workshops were conducted throughout the country to educate and train nail care owners and workers. A Nail Care Booklet to complement the training was developed and printed in both English and Vietnamese; a Korean version is currently in translation.



“It was fascinating to be around EPA, industry, university, and community group experts as they all discussed ways to make the environment better for all groups.”



CHAPTER 5 - ATTRACTING TALENT

Providing environmental education and employment opportunities to AAPI students is another priority area for EPA. This year, nine AAPI students were selected for inclusion in the first round of EPA Intern Program interviews and seven were selected into the two-year program. In addition, eight AAPI interns participated in EPA's Summer Intern program. OHR also worked with numerous institutions serving Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders throughout the year to organize internships and we attended recruitment conferences and programs.

In addition, numerous activities were organized to provide environmental awareness and education to AAPI and other youths. States Piyachat Terrell, AAPI Program Manager, "Through Earth Day activities, mural painting, tree planting, field trips, river clean-up and other science group projects, AAPI interns and regional staff provided both fun and educational opportunities for many children to learn about their environment."

Working with the Superfund Redevelopment Program, Community Outreach groups, and the Office of Environmental Information, efforts are underway to simplify, translate and find ways to transform EPA's browser to read Chinese to communicate more effectively with the AAPI community.

National Hispanic Outreach

This year, OHR revised and updated its National Hispanic Outreach Strategy (NHOS) to reach out and improve upon the recruitment and hiring of Hispanics. One key element of this strategy calls for developing new business and professional partnerships with organizations that support the development and employment of Hispanics. A significant success in this area was the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Hispanic College Fund (HCF) of Washington, DC, a private non-profit organization founded in 1993 to develop the next generation of Hispanic business and government professionals. The purpose of the MOU is to cooperate with HCF in outreach efforts geared towards increasing the number of qualified applicants for environmental positions at EPA.

EPA was very active this year in sponsoring and participating in numerous national, regional, and local conferences that support EPA's work on the White House Hispanic Initiative. EPA participated in the National Hispanic Environmental Council Conference (NHEC), the Society for Hispanic Professional Engineers Conference (SHPE), and the League of United Latin American Citizens Conference (LULAC).

EPA also worked with Hispanic Outreach and Recruitment coordinators in other federal agencies including the Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management and the National Park Service to enhance and share information about Hispanics who are interested in working for the Federal Government.

Additionally, OHR conducted a study of EPA grant and contract assistance to the Hispanic community and made recommendations for ways to include more universities, colleges, and non-profit Hispanic organizations in EPA's work.

Senior Environmental Employment Program

Susan Street has been involved with the Senior Environmental Employment (SEE) Program for many years and has been EPA's SEE Program Manager for 10 years. The SEE Program was initially funded through a 1976 partnership between EPA and the U.S. Administration on Aging as a demonstration project. Formal legislation creating the program was later signed into law in 1984. The legislation authorized EPA to provide grants to certain nonprofit organizations to place individuals age 55 and over in assignments that support environmental pollution prevention, abatement and control. Several years ago, EPA began to expand the program through Inter-Agency Agreements and now, eight other agencies and a few states are using SEE enrollees.



"Through Earth Day activities, mural painting, tree planting, field trips, river clean-up and other science group projects, AAPI interns and regional staff provided both fun and educational opportunities for many children to learn about their environment."



CHAPTER 5 - ATTRACTING TALENT

According to Susan, “Currently about ten percent of EPA’s workforce is comprised of SEE enrollees and the benefits are many. Through the SEE Program, EPA’s managers have expertise at their fingertips for short- or long-term projects. Older workers have a wealth of knowledge, skills and abilities that they have acquired throughout a lifetime of work experience—experience that the Agency can, and has, put to good use. SEE Program enrollees gain access to employment opportunities, as well as affordable health insurance coverage that may not otherwise be available to them.”

At Headquarters, SEE enrollees provide a wide variety of support services, from clerical to professional. In the Regions, many SEEs can be found working side by side with EPA employees in emergency response assignments.

John Marshall, a SEE enrollee assigned to the Office of Ecosystems Protection and Remediation in Denver, Colorado, is just one example. John assists EPA’s emergency response efforts by helping to write and review standard operating procedures, working with local fire departments to help prepare for emergency incidents, and setting up training.

John’s SEE Program assignment is in many ways a continuation of his work for 27 years with the Denver Fire Department. Prior to retiring, John focused on arson investigation and hazardous materials response, while also teaching hazardous waste investigation at the Federal Law Enforcement Center.


John’s EPA Monitor, who heads up counter-terrorism efforts for Region 8, feels that John is helping to bridge a gap that sometimes exists between federal and local agencies. According to John, his work is both exciting and meaningful. “If something happens, I like being in there doing something to help,” John said. “That’s what I like about it. I’ve got the training and I can work with the people who are taking action,” John added.

Summer Student Employment Program


This year, OHR created an Agency-wide online hiring process for students seeking summer employment and managers looking to find qualified summer help. The Web site-enabled program offices to customize their own specific pages and receive e-mails containing actual applications for positions within their organization. Applicants received greater clarity about the nature of positions, as well as, the window of opportunity in which to apply for a position. Program offices and summer students found the system easy to use and are excited about additional enhancements planned for next year.

Talent Branding

OHR was extremely busy this year working to establish and promote an EPA ‘talent brand’ to be used in recruiting and outreach activities. Through 50 personal interviews and three focus groups involving individuals who are involved in recruiting activities, OHR was able to determine which types of materials would be most effective in supporting EPA’s recruitment goals. An inclusion study was conducted with members of various audiences, including American Indians, Hispanics, African Americans, Asian Americans, people with disabilities, Generation X and Yers, older employees, second career candidates, and others to ensure that recruiting materials and outreach advertisements would appeal to their intended audience. In addition, a handbook was developed to help recruiters and managers learn how to use the Brand and understand its value.



“Older workers have a wealth of knowledge, skills and abilities that they have acquired throughout a lifetime of work experience—experience that the Agency can, and has, put to good use.”



“If something happens, I like being in there doing something to help. I’ve got the training and I can work with the people who are taking action.”



CHAPTER 5 - ATTRACTING TALENT

Based on this research, OHR created and distributed to recruiters a number of marketing materials, including two new brochures (each containing a small disk or “digi card” with information about EPA’s careers Web site), job announcement stationery, posters, print advertisements, and more. In addition, OHR completed a new career Web site which incorporates the ‘talent brand’ and features a diverse group of EPA employees sharing their employment story.



Stability Change
Environment Public Health
Individual Team
Local National
Inspiration Consensus
Present Future
Work Life

Make a change for the better. At the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA), there are opportunities for everyone to participate in the important work of safeguarding the environment. From the student intern to the senior executive — your individual skills and knowledge can lead you in new career directions. And you'll be rewarded with solid benefits that equal the dedication you put into your work. Find your career balance at www.epa.gov/careers. U.S. EPA is an equal opportunity employer.

U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

Individual Team
Work Life
Environment Public Health
Stability Change
Present Future
Local National
Inspiration Consensus

Something good for myself. Something good for the world around me. At the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA), there are opportunities for everyone to participate in the important work of safeguarding the environment. From the student intern to the senior executive — your individual skills and knowledge can lead you in new career directions. And you'll be rewarded with solid benefits that equal the dedication you put into your work. Find your career balance at www.epa.gov/careers. U.S. EPA is an equal opportunity employer.

U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

CHAPTER 6 - HIRING TALENT

EPA'S SCIENTISTS, POLICY MAKERS, CONTRACT SPECIALISTS, ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF AND OTHERS ALL PLAY A PART IN PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT. AND IT ALL BEGINS AT THE OFFICE OF HUMAN RESOURCES. EVERY DAY, USING RESOURCES LIKE EZHIRE, DIVERSITY OUTREACH, AN AWARD-WINNING INTERNSHIP PROGRAM, TRAINING AND MORE, THE OFFICE OF HUMAN RESOURCES RECRUITS AND DEVELOPS THE MOST TALENTED WORKFORCE POSSIBLE. IT'S ONE OF THE WAYS WE HELP EPA PRESERVE OUR ENVIRONMENT FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS.

EZHire

EPA's "EZ Hire" online employment application process received praise this year both from employees seeking positions within the agency and EPA's IT investment group which awarded the system the highest possible score. The EZ Hire system has become an invaluable tool to help the Agency track and monitor compliance with OPM's 45-day hiring model. It does this by accurately tracking the number of days it takes from the close of a vacancy announcement to the date the job offer is made to the applicant.

Four years ago, Eileen Mayer came to EPA from an environmental law firm. An Environmental Protection Specialist with the Office of Environmental Information's Toxics Release Inventory Program (TRI), Eileen has her position today as a result of using the EZ Hire process. "Since high school, I have always wanted to work at EPA because I felt, and still feel, that EPA is the place to work if you want to work in the environment and make a real difference," said Eileen.

Eileen found out about her first job at EPA through the USA jobs online system. She applied for several job series and took the first position offered to her, even though it was not exactly in an area she preferred. It took a while, but one day she came upon a job advertisement in EZ Hire for a position in the TRI Program which would utilize her interest and background in environmental regulations. "I applied as soon as I saw the vacancy," said Eileen. "EZ Hire is really a vast improvement to other online recruiting tools because you know exactly what office you are applying to, you know exactly what position you are applying for, and you have some idea of what the position entails," Eileen added.

"I am very proud to tell people that I work at EPA in the TRI Program," Eileen continued. "In a way, it's the completion of something that I've wanted for a very long time. In fact, I've referred my friends to EPA and EZ Hire and they have gotten positions here as well," she said.

Orientation Program

"I had just graduated from the University of Maryland and was attending a job fair when I learned about employment positions at EPA," said Jasprit Kaur Matta. "I applied through EZ Hire and now I am an IT Specialist in the Office of the Inspector General's audit group," Jasprit added. Although Jasprit has only been with EPA for one month, she has found it to be a really friendly environment and looks forward to the training opportunities that await her. "I am excited about acquiring all the knowledge that I can," says Jasprit.


Jasprit's learning opportunities started on day one. "The new employee orientation session was very informative," Jasprit said. "While there were a lot of documents to fill out, I also took ethics training and learned a lot about benefits, such as the Leave Bank and the transit subsidy," Jasprit added.

"From the day the Team Vegas Human Resource Office called me with my job offer, I have found everyone to be very helpful and ready to answer my questions," said Jasprit. "They explained things very well. I tell my friends that I am somewhat overwhelmed with the size of Washington, DC, and that my building looks like a museum, but that it is really beautiful. I believe my position has a lot of promotion potential and I am glad I took the job," Jasprit added.

To further improve the orientation process at EPA's Headquarters Offices, new employees like Jasprit will soon be able to fill out many of their employment forms electronically prior to their first day at work.

Human Resource Consulting Services

Twenty-nine years is a long time to work someplace, especially doing the same thing. For Le'Ontyn Buggs, a Human Resources Specialist who services



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"The new employee orientation session was very informative."



CHAPTER 6 - HIRING TALENT

the Office of the Administrator, advising EPA's program managers and employees on human resource matters. This is what she loves to do. "A great deal of my work involves providing guidance and options to managers so they can make informed decisions about hiring," said Le'Ontyn. "I also spend part of my day talking to employees, either on the phone or in person, helping to walk them through the online employment application process and checking the status of their paperwork," she said.

The hiring process is a very paper- and labor-intensive effort with numerous steps along the way. It starts with a manager preparing a SF 52 that outlines the type of position they would like to fill. This form gets logged into an OHR tracking system, sent to Personnel Security for their review, and assigned to a Human Resources specialist to make a variety of classification determinations ranging from establishing the official title of the position to determining the position's promotion potential.

"After a position has been properly classified, I will meet with a Subject Matter Expert (SME) who has been designated by the manager doing the hiring," Le'Ontyn said. "Together, we analyze the major duties of the position and the percentage of time spent on each duty. I help the manager select from a series of questions found in our online EZHire application system. Based upon the position, we determine how to weigh those questions in terms of their importance. Once the manager is satisfied with the questions, I draft a vacancy announcement and assign an opening and closing date. I will review the applications for the vacancy and develop a certificate for the manager that lists the top 10 candidates. Later, I will call the applicant who has been selected and make a job offer, making sure that a completed SF 52 is inputted into the PeoplePlus system and that an SF 50 is produced," outlines Le'Ontyn.

According to Le'Ontyn, "I went to school to learn the Human Resources field and I can truly say that I enjoy what I do. I try to dig deep to figure out what managers want. It warms my heart to finally see an enthusiastic applicant be hired. I view this as having completed my assignment," she said.

"To make a career in human resources, you have to be organized, focused, patient and a good communicator to your customers," said Le'Ontyn. "Even though there is never any down time, and everyone expects you to focus on their need as if they are your only customer, there are days when I know that I have really made a difference in someone's life," Le'Ontyn added.

Separations: 865
Reassignments: 704
Promotions: 992
New Appointments: 1,389
Quality Step Increases: 299
Awards: 11,585

Processing Transactions


Hiring talent, and making other employee status changes, involves another important function in the Office of Human Resources: processing human resource transactions. It's a quiet role, but no less important. It is also a labor- and time-intensive job that requires attention to detail.

This year was no exception as the Customer Service teams that service Headquarters employees processed approximately 16,000 different personnel transactions.

"I think I enter around 50 transactions a week," said Pat Moore, a Human Resource Specialist in OHR. "Some transactions take ten minutes, others take 45 minutes," she added. Pat is a "PeoplePlus Power User" and it is her job to verify and enter human resource transactions for some of EPA's program offices. "I have always found this work to be very challenging. I am still learning something new everyday that I can share with other members of the Customer Service staff," she said.

"Everyone wants to be treated fairly and be paid on time, so this pile on my desk represents much more than file folders—it represents an employee's promotion or hiring paperwork. I want to be paid on time and paid the right amount, and they do too," said Pat.

According to Pat, she spent a lot of time the past year helping to train HR Specialists to make the transition from entering human resource data in HR Pro to entering the data in PeoplePlus. "We did a lot of testing to make sure that the human resource data entered into the system was being captured correctly," said Pat. "The testing and verification process was worth it because when we went live with PeoplePlus, and an employee had some difficulty with their pay, we were able to figure out why there was a problem and to help that employee resolve the issue quickly," Pat added.



"To make a career in human resources, you have to be organized, focused, patient and a good communicator to your customers."



"I've always found this work to be challenging."



CHAPTER 7 - NURTURING TALENT

AFTER HIRING THE BEST AND BRIGHTEST, OHR WORKS HARD TO RETAIN EPA'S TALENTED WORKFORCE. TO DO THIS, OHR ENSURES THAT EMPLOYEES HAVE A WORKING ENVIRONMENT THAT PROVIDES EXCELLENT BENEFITS, LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES, CAREER GROWTH AND MOBILITY AND WORK/LIFE BALANCE.

Benefits Program

Like many federal agencies, EPA offers a wide variety of employee benefits. These benefits include life insurance, child care tuition assistance, health insurance, federal long term care insurance, flexible spending accounts, employee assistance programs, sign language interpretation services, and a thrift savings plan (TSP).

Retirement Counseling Center

Every day, Nicole Early helps EPA's managers and employees with benefit services. For example, when an employee gets married, she helps to process a life insurance change of beneficiary form. When an adult child moves out of their parent's house, she may assist in changing the employee's health insurance contributions from family coverage to single coverage. And everyday, numerous requests come in for new benefits. The most popular request in 2004 was for supplemental dental coverage.



But one of the biggest parts of her job is providing retirement counseling. In September 2004, in preparation for a new round of buyouts and early outs, OHR established a Retirement Counseling Center. Managed by Nicole Early and staffed with both EPA employees and contractor counselors, the center has been busy helping EPA's employees sort through retirement calculations, insurance continuation questions, survivor benefits, and the difficult decision to retire.

The Retirement Counseling Center is available to all EPA employees, but is especially critical for employees interested in taking advantage of the buyouts and early outs. Whether a walk-in or scheduled appointment, counselors help employees explore the various retirement options that are available. "Many of our employees have already participated in a three day retirement seminar, or have tried to do their own calculation before seeking out our help," said Nicole. "Most of the individuals who come here have already made up their minds and are ready to go," she said.

"But we don't want people to feel they have to retire; we want them to be comfortable with their decision," Nicole added. "I worked with one lady who was very indecisive about leaving. She had worked for 37 years, was alone, and really loved to work. It took three hours of discussions and many e-mails before she decided her heart's desire was to leave," said Nicole."

"One of the best things about this job is my ability to listen to peoples' stories, to learn what they have done professionally and to hear of their current challenges. Their stories are both amazing and touching. Sometimes I will get a call or postcard from someone who has retired telling me how happy they are with their decision and thanking me for helping them during the final stage in their government career. It is just one of the things that makes my job very rewarding," Nicole said.

Leave Bank

Another benefit which sometimes gets taken for granted is the Leave Bank. For Doña Canales, an Environmental Protection Specialist with the Office of Air and Radiation, this benefit turned out to be one of her most important ones.

"I was diagnosed with breast cancer when I was five months pregnant," said Doña. "It was a shock and we didn't know what to do. The staff in the Office of Human Resources really helped. They were sympathetic and compassionate and they worked very hard to expedite getting me the time I needed to have my treatments and take care of my newborn son," Doña added.

"When my son was born, after three rounds of chemo, it was one of the most amazing moments. I was bald, and he had hair. But, it was just another miracle," Doña said.

"One of the best things about this job is my ability to listen to peoples' stories, to learn what they have done professionally and to hear of their current challenges."



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CHAPTER 7 - NURTURING TALENT

New Hire Survey

Welcoming new hires into the Agency is an important first step in an employees' career, and what may ultimately turn out to be a factor in whether their EPA career is lengthy or short-lived.

To get a better sense of employees' early experiences with the Agency, the Recruiting Roundtable developed and conducted a survey of newly hired employees. Information gained from the survey was disseminated to unions, Human Resource Officers and Program Management Officers, Recruiting Coordinators, IT and LAN managers, survey recipients and others. Information from the survey will be used to help improve both the recruitment and orientation processes.

Project Announcement Visibility Effort (PAVE)

"One of the best things about EPA's Project Announcement Visibility Effort (PAVE) is that it broadens opportunities for all employees to work on high-profile projects," said Tyrone Aiken, PAVE Project Manager.

Until PAVE was introduced into EPA in 2000, many EPA employees learned about high-visibility projects or details only through word of mouth or from their manager. Consequently, many qualified people never heard about volunteer opportunities for many interesting and challenging projects.

In the last four years, over 1,200 employees have used PAVE's online project posting system to request an opportunity to work on one of the over 450 high-profile projects and details in the system. Initially created for use in the Office of Prevention, Pesticides, and Toxic Substances (OPPTS), the system has been used by the Office of Air and Radiation, Office of Administration and Resources Management, Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance, Office of Research and Development, Office of Water, Office of the Administrator, Office of Solid Waste, and EPA's Region 10. Work is currently underway to place the system on the Internet so that it can be expanded Agency-wide.

"I have seen several of my colleagues reborn as a result of the opportunity PAVE gave them to show what they can do," said Tyrone. "I knew a chemist who was ready to retire. She learned about an assignment through PAVE and applied. As soon as she went on the new assignment, her demeanor and health changed almost immediately. She enjoyed the feeling of being valued and considered putting off retiring for a while. PAVE is a good thing for managers and a good thing for employees. Everyone wins," said Tyrone.

Senior Executive Programs

SES Candidate Development Program

In March 2004, all fifty-one Senior Executive Service (SES) Candidate Development Program participants graduated after an intensive eighteen-month program. All of the candidates received certification from the Office of Personnel Management and are eligible for non-competitive placement into SES positions.

Given the expected number of SES retirements over the next few years, the Agency is currently considering whether to conduct another class in the near future.

A recent SES graduate described his experience in the program. "In 1991, I left private law practice to join the staff of EPA's Office of General Counsel (OGC)," states David Lloyd. "I worked in OGC for ten years as an attorney and eventually became an Assistant General Counsel," he said. "After attending several briefings about the Senior Executive Service (SES) Candidate Development Program, I was convinced that I wanted to apply in order to enhance my chances of moving into the SES."

"The rigorous application process was very useful and the program provided me with the opportunity to interact and build relationships with other leaders throughout the Agency," said David. "I also enjoyed working with fellow candidates on our SES team project. There were many different people with really strong personalities, but we worked through the challenges and ended up learning a lot in the end," David added.

Shortly before being accepted into the program, David had taken a detail with the Office of Administration and Resources Management (OARM). It was in OARM where he received his SES appointment and assumed responsibility as the Director of the Facilities Management and Services Division.



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CHAPTER 7 - NURTURING TALENT

“As I reflect on my experiences in the Candidate Development Program, I am convinced that there are many benefits to individuals and the Agency when we provide detail opportunities and training to help managers learn how to better manage people and budgets,” states David. “I don’t know if there will be another candidate development class any time soon, but whether or not there is one, I endorse the concept of managerial mobility and giving individuals an opportunity to broaden their professional experiences,” David said.

Placing SES Program Graduates

In May of 2004, OHR formalized the non-competitive solicitation process for current SES members and SES Candidate Development Program (CDP) graduates in the Merit Staffing Plan. This new process will allow program offices to view and select eligible SES CDP graduates for SES vacancies without having to go through the process of formally announcing an SES vacancy.

Enhancing SES Communications

Ensuring that communication to and among members of EPA’s SES is a priority, OHR organized the Annual SES Meeting, “Managing the Future of EPA: Leadership Challenges.” The conference, which had over 250 executives in attendance, provided an opportunity for SES members to discuss global environmental priorities, public attitudes about the environment, and ways to solve environmental problems through collaboration.

Also, OHR continues to produce a quarterly newsletter for EPA’s executive corps. *Executive Update*, features articles on performance management issues, names of SES members joining and departing the Agency, and executive developmental opportunities. The SES Program Intranet Web site has been revised as well, to provide more current information of interest to SES members.

Pay for Performance

Improving SES program performance is a priority for both EPA and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). Last year, OPM gave agencies the authority to adjust the pay of senior executives above the current rate limitations. In response, EPA developed a new SES appraisal/rating system for 2004. The new system will pay the highest-performing SES members up to the rate of Level II of the Executive Schedule (\$158,100) and apply a higher aggregate limitation on pay equivalent to the rate payable to the Vice President (\$203,000), pending issuance of the final pay regulations.

Options were also developed to establish pay bands, set pay for new members of the SES, and to adjust base pay based on performance ratings. OPM approved EPA’s plan for 2004 ‘provisional certification’ and OHR is continuing to work for full certification of its SES ‘pay for performance’ plan for 2005-2006.

Workforce Development

OHR continues to make significant contributions to the development of the Agency’s workforce by offering the following courses on an ongoing basis:

- New Skills/New Options - an online developmental training program for administrative employees;
- Mid-level Development - a training curriculum for EPA’s 14,000 mid-level employees which focuses on core competencies and the five SES Executive Core Qualifications;
- Excellence in Supervision - a highly successful training program for first-line supervisors; and
- Stepping Up to Supervision - a training program for those contemplating entering the supervisory ranks.

To further support the professional development of our workforce, OHR, in partnership with the Office of Personnel Management and their Gov Online Learning Center (GOLearn), will offer EPA employees one-stop access for more than 40 E-learning courses covering a wide variety of topics including those on team-building, IT security, PC and business applications, and leadership and management.

In addition, OHR will be working with OPM in early 2005 to provide more than 2,000 online courses, including courses that lead to professional computer certifications and college credit toward an associate’s degree. An online searchable library containing more than 5,000 titles supporting the E-learning courses will also be available.



CHAPTER 7 - NURTURING TALENT

E-learning is just one of the many advances in Workforce Development at EPA. “We are transforming workforce development at EPA,” said Sharon Ridings, OHR’s Leadership Development Program Manager. “We are not just developing training programs, we are working to develop a process to help build employees’ competencies,” Sharon said.

“One example of this is our Excellence in Supervision course,” said Sharon. “It has had a tremendous impact by helping supervisors to understand that one of their major responsibilities is to encourage and partner with employees as they develop the skills needed for current and future challenges and opportunities. Supervisors are realizing that when employees develop new skills they are more confident and dedicated to providing quality products and services to their customers. We all want to do our best. We need our leaders to work with us and provide feedback that will help us to build on current abilities and develop new skills,” said Sharon.

“I often receive calls two to six months after someone has taken the course and they tell me that they did not realize how much it has changed their life,” said Sharon. “For example, one Division Director told me she had no idea why she did not trust her employees to do the work they were hired to do, but realized that this was probably contributing to her high staff turnover. The information shared in the course helped her to understand how her management style was impacting her employees. By adjusting the way she responds and interacts with her employees, she saw how she could improve her department’s work environment,” added Sharon.

As the Agency works on expanding its Leadership Model, it has come to recognize that everyone is a leader in this organization, and that everyone needs to utilize leadership competencies at their own level. Competencies include: the way we communicate, handle conflict, make decisions and work on an ever-increasing number of cross organizational and cross-functional teams. In OHR, one of the challenges is to find ways to develop five different generations of employees, each with different needs and learning styles. To address this, OHR has adopted a “blended learning approach” which utilizes E-learning, classroom instruction, mentoring, coaching, book learning and other tools.

“EPA has an amazingly talented workforce that is eager and hungry to learn,” said Sharon. When I teach a course, I watch the participants’ faces. I love to see that moment when someone has an epiphany and realizes they have the ability to change something that they have been doing for years. I think I have the greatest job in the Agency,” Sharon said.

“I also have been very fortunate to work with many wonderful volunteers from around the Agency who share my passion for helping to develop others. Some of the facilitators who have really helped out this past year include: Steven Johnson, Region 3; Richard Wooster and Mary Rogers, Region 6; David Doyle, Jan Tarpey, and Mark Hague, Region 7; Debbie and David Janik and Elyana Sutin, Region 8; John Ong and John Yonemura, Region 9; Linda Gerber, Office of Prevention, Pesticides, and Toxic Substances (OPPTS); Julie Taitt, Office of the Administrator (OA); and Edna Rodriguez, OHR. They share their passion for learning and their talent for sharing information in a way that engages the learners. We are fortunate to have their support and the support of their leaders,” Sharon said.

Many employees benefit from learning experiences offered through the Office of Human Resources. For Al Gallegos, Hispanic Employment Program Manager and Network Operations Service Manager for the Office of Environmental Information, this training really paid off.

“I’ve taken a number of classes here at EPA dealing with management, leading teams and how to conduct meetings, and I found them very helpful,” said Al. “The classes have helped to broaden my level of confidence as a speaker. Now I feel more comfortable participating in diversity recruitment conferences and talking to students on a one-to-one basis. I tell them about EPA and our mission, and how they would really like to work here,” Al added.



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CHAPTER 8 - PEOPLE FOCUSED. ENVIRONMENTALLY DRIVEN.

Refining our Future

This year, EPA's Office of Human Resources took many steps forward to ensure that it will be positioned to meet the human resource needs of the future.

Progress was made in achieving many of our National Human Capital Strategic Planning goals. We have worked to enhance our workforce planning and Agency restructuring efforts, to expedite the hiring process, to develop and implement a performance management system, and to find ways to bring greater efficiency to our work through advancing a number of E-government initiatives.

Working collaboratively with our unions, Human Resource Offices throughout the Regions and laboratories, and Program Management Officials at Headquarters, we are implementing new human resource programs. We are finding ways to improve customer service for all of EPA's 18,000 employees so that they can achieve a 'career balance' that is good for them and the environment.

We have stepped up our special emphasis recruitment initiatives, continued to offer the successful EPA Intern Program, and helped to develop a new group of SES managers to help ensure that we have the right people—with the right skills—to meet the workforce needs we face today, and know we will face in the future.

Our reorganization was a challenging first step, but now we are dedicated and determined to keep moving forward and take all the necessary steps to ensure that the Office of Human Resources remains people focused and environmentally driven as we recruit, develop and strategically plan for the most talented workforce possible.

